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THIRTY-FIVE DEFENDANTS INDICTED IN COCAINE CONSPIRACY

SAVANNAH: Lisa Godbey Wood, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia, announced that thirty-five defendants have been named in an indictment returned by a Grand Jury sitting in Savannah in connection with a major cocaine distribution conspiracy. In an eleven count indictment unsealed today, the thirty-five defendants, most of whom reside either in the Metter or Atlanta area, were charged in various counts with conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute, and to distribute, 50 grams or more of cocaine base (crack) and 5 kilograms or more of cocaine hydrochloride (powder), possession with intent to distribute and distribution of cocaine base (crack), and possession with intent to distribute and distribution of cocaine hydrochloride (powder). The indictment names **Julius Pinkston**, of Atlanta, and **Stephanie Collins**, of Metter, as the leaders of the drug trafficking organization along with thirty-three others. Bench warrants were issued for all of the defendants, and thirteen defendants have thus far been arrested. Initial appearances in U.S. District Court in Savannah and Atlanta are being held today and tomorrow.

The case resulted from a year long investigation by the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, including the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation,

the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, the Tri-Circuit Drug Task Force, the Bulloch County Drug Suppression Team, the Candler County Sheriff's Office, the Ogeechee Judicial District Attorney's Office, and the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Georgia. Other agencies assisting in the arrests include the Candler County Sheriff's Office, the Metter Police Department, the Georgia State Patrol, and the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia. Wood praised the efforts of all the agencies involved and called the investigation "a great example of federal-state law enforcement cooperation."

If convicted of the charges, the defendants face statutory penalties of up to life imprisonment without parole and millions of dollars in fines. Wood stressed that an indictment is only an accusation and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are entitled to a fair trial, during which it will be the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. The lead prosecutor representing the United States is Assistant U.S. Attorney Darrin L. McCullough in Savannah. The case will be tried in the Statesboro Division of U.S. District Court before Judge B. Avant Edenfield.

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